

The Escapist

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.



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Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf

The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas:

The Vampire Murders

The Haunting of Alexas Mansion

The Great Debate

Metrognomes:

The Demons of the Blood

The Shaman's Apprentice

The Legends of Nod:

The Dragons of Nod

All for the Blood of Nightstorm

Enter: The Wanderer

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CLARK
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2021

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First Edition: December 2005

Second PDF E-Book Edition: March 2021

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“**I** have to dance.” It was clear to the other man that this was no invitation, as Tom put a hand on his chest to stop him from following him onto the dance floor. The speakers had just started blaring a remix of the Village People’s “YMCA.” It had reminded Tom of his father, holding him up as a child, moving his arms to form the letters along with the chorus at someone’s wedding reception. So long ago, Tom couldn’t even remember who’s wedding it had been. The thought had triggered such painful memories. If he didn’t

lose himself on the dance floor quickly, he was going to have another sleepless night.

Tom caught the rhythm of the music, tried to become a part of it, like the notes he imagined gliding through the air before the speakers. Tom giggled at the image, but he was no less brooding. He tried his best to dance with all the men on the dance floor at once, while at the same time dancing with none of them at all. The chorus filled his ears, and his father returned to his mind. His father, who had died when he was so young. His thoughts traveled naturally to the mother who'd been murdered by Tom's best friend. This, of course, led his mind back to Daniel. He couldn't allow himself to keep thinking on any of them, and there was no one he felt safe talking to. He could only dance or cause trouble. At the moment, nothing aside from these two options could take his thoughts away from him. When he didn't escape his memories, Tom often found himself hating that he had survived the attack from his friend on the night of his mother's death, now so many years before.

He danced furiously, wanting to vanish, wanting to be a note, or better yet, the ever silent treble clef that no listener would notice or miss. He wanted to be a nothing; a no one. But he wasn't. He was a burning flame; an ocean of being. He always had been.

Tom was a man with nothing to lose, which drove him mad, because he wanted to lose it all. Those who didn't know Tom's

mind, which included everyone he presently associated with, aside from his dog who accompanied him everywhere, could easily be misled. It was easy for them to believe that Tom had it pretty good. He was a senior at SMU, majoring in Humanities, simply because he wasn't grounded enough to major in anything else. He had been involved with the Theatre department off and on, receiving excellent reviews for his every performance. He was an accomplished painter, having made an unheard of one-hundred-thousand at his first art show only two months before, selling some of his incredibly deranged mental explosions on canvas. This was Tom's life, and it was all escapism. It was Tom's never ending hunger. Escape, escape, escape.

Cher replaced the Village People, asking if he believed in life after love. Tom laughed to himself, as he adjusted to the new rhythm. "Yes," he said aloud. "Unfortunately, it takes a hell of a lot to douse *this* flame." He danced.

It wasn't working.

Tom looked around until he found Samson. He smiled, as he saw the shining golden retriever running up the stairs, probably on his way to watch a drag show. Samson was the most amazingly human dog Tom had ever known. Likely because that's how Tom treated him, and that's how Tom insisted others treat him. Samson had been the only thing to bring him back when so many people in his life had died all at once.

The dancers, bouncers, bartenders, and professional drag queens at the club now knew to give Tom's dog the run of the place when they were there, but Tom had gotten into a fistfight with the doorman before it could happen. It wasn't the fistfight, or getting thrown out on his ear that had won Tom and Samson their place here. In the end, it had been money; his benefactor's money. Tom thought now of his godfather, whose money it hadn't been; the godfather who'd been beaten down by circumstances in life not unlike Tom's own, to the point that he couldn't take care of himself, let alone Tom, when Tom's mother had been killed. It was Julius and Lillian who had taken Tom in, allowed him to keep the malnourished puppy he'd been found with, paid for him to go to prestigious SMU in Dallas.

Tom sneered at the *prestige* of the school. He found SMU to be nothing more than a party school for rich kids. He had been poor all his life, until Julius and Lillian had taken him in. Sure, he had his own money now, for a little while, but he would have never even had the art show, nor been allowed to darken the door of Dallas' premier gay dance club with his dog, had it not been for their money.

Tom laughed. There had been a man in his home town who'd kept wolves as pets. Tom had wanted to follow his lead. He remembered a time when Mr. Alexas had been told rudely that his *dog* couldn't come into the room at a wake. Mr. Alexas had shrugged, then told the man that was fine, but he'd have to

tell the wolf himself. The man had looked at the wolf. The wolf had growled and bared its fangs. The man had let the matter slide. Tom laughed aloud. He didn't care if he looked like he was on something, laughing alone on the dance floor. The deceased at that wake had been his godfather's younger brother. He hadn't thought of it in some time. He'd died from AIDS. Tom pondered it. No matter how he might nurse himself on thoughts of death at times, that was one way Tom would never care to go. He'd seen the man on his death bed days before that wake. Skeletal, utterly swarmed with lesions, shaking, barely able to breathe, surrounded by plastic, his family forced to wear gloves even to touch him.

Tom didn't notice that the music had changed by the time he'd stopped dancing. It was time to move on to plan B. When dancing didn't work, Tom would always find trouble. He walked off of the dance floor, searching the club for signs of a good distraction. His eyes stopped on a shirtless Native American, authentic by the looks of him. The man looked to be about twenty-five; his black hair was long, down to his butt. There was a feather weaved into it. Tom chuckled and shook his head. "Gotta love the *Village* People."

Not knowing exactly where Samson had gotten off to, Tom decided to go to plan C instead. Without fail, plan C always led right back to plan B anyway. He watched the Indian at the pool

table from the corner of his eye, as he sat down at the bar and ordered a drink from Mike.

“Try and go slower this time, Tommy boy.” Mike offered him the usual shimmering, perfect smile, and Tom found it annoying. He lifted his drink and didn’t return the bottle to the counter until it was empty. He belched, then laughed. Mike rolled his eyes. “Here we go.” He shook his head.

Tom had tried and failed to get Mike into bed before, but the thirty-something bartender simply refused to find blondes attractive. He’d said it was because he was a blonde himself, and therefore found only darker features attractive. Tom didn’t understand that at all. “How drunk do I have to get for you to come home with me tonight, Mike?”

“Sorry, young’un. Aside from having the scenario a bit backwards, you know my fetishes don’t apply to the likes of you.”

Tom laughed. “What? The hair thing still? I just don’t understand. I love other blondes... *and* brunettes. I love anyone who can take my mind off of things. Even if they look *exactly* like me. In fact, if I’d been born twins, I’d be incestuous.” He looked to his empty bottle and muttered, “I would, dang it.”

“I’m sure you would.” Mike handed him another bottle. It was empty.

“What the hell?”

“Just wanted to help you along.”

“You’re a faggot.”

“You are correct, sir! And here’s your prize.” He put a full bottle down on the counter. “Besides,” Mike picked up their earlier conversation, “I’ve got an eye on Tonto tonight.” He nodded towards the pool tables.

“He won’t be here when you get off.” Tom smiled crazily. “I’m gonna go shit in his Fruit Loops.”

Mike rolled his eyes. “You are so much trouble. I swear, sometimes you make me miss the hole in the wall little bar I worked at in Houston.”

Tom was pleased by this. “Oh yeah. What was it called again?”

Mike smirked. “David and Jonathan’s.”

Tom laughed out loud. “That’s so awesome! I love that!” He downed his second beer. He started contemplating his godfather’s legendary drinking problem. He had to get his mind off of the past, even if he had to escape into a rerun of someone else’s past in order to do it. “So why’d you quit that job again?”

“I told you, some of the people I had to deal with were absolute *vampires*. I needed a change of scenery. Now, why don’t you tell me about *your* past for a change?”

Tom looked down and saw Samson sitting by his leg, a flower taped to his ear. He was panting happily. Tom breathed a sigh of relief. *Right on time*. He smiled mischievously up at Mike. “Nah. It’d take too long.”

He stood up and went over to the pool table. “Hey, Tonto!”

The Indian was immediately annoyed, as he turned to face Tom. “Oh, shit! It’s my Arian nightmare come true! And he’s so witty! No one’s *ever* called me *Tonto* before.”

“Hey, sarcasm kills relationships.” Tom was annoyed to realize the Indian had already finished his game and was beginning to grin. Tom had hoped to *interrupt* the game, make him angry, start a fight.

“Well, let’s think this through.” The Indian suggested. “If I’m Tonto, then you must be Custer. *There’s* a relationship worth keeping healthy.”

“Oh, cry me a trail of tears, Shitting Bull.”

The Indian got right in Tom’s face. “Another good one. Where’d you pick that mouth up? Hitler Youth program?”

Tom laughed. Plan B had turned into Plan D unintentionally. The Indian was loving it. “Hey, you wanna fight?”

“Why, do you?”

Tom shrugged, noticing the man was so close they could have kissed, and smiling. “Yeah. I wanna see if you can scalp me.”

“No. You’re cute *without* body art.”

“Nice. A compliment. Do you admit defeat?”

“Not yet.” He ran a finger up Tom’s torso, resting a hand on his shoulder. “Still wanna fight then?”

Tom didn’t flinch. “Yeah.”

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The man kissed him then, pulling him closer, pressing their bodies together, caressing Tom's back with one hand and squeezing his butt with the other. He pulled back lightly and asked, "How 'bout now?"

Tom giggled. "Why do people scream *Geronimo* when they jump out of planes?"

His new friend laughed, then kissed Tom again, lightly. "Your place or mine?"

"Mine," Tom said. "I don't like waking up in teepees." Tom had found his escape for the night, but he knew the next night, inevitably, the dance would go on.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of ten books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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